105

THUNDERBOLTS®

A MARVEL® COMICS EVENT

CIVIL WAR™

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NICIEZA

GRUMMETT

THEY WERE THE MASTERS OF EVIL. THEY WERE SUPER-VILLAINS. THEY HAD A PLAN. THEY PRETENDED TO BE HEROES. SLOWLY, THEY REALIZED THEY REALLY WANTED TO BE HEROES. SOME HAVE FAILED. SOME HAVE SUCCEEDED. MOST ARE STILL TRYING...

THUNDERBOLTS

in "SWIMMING WITH SHARKS"

BARON HELMUT ZEMO

MELISSA GOLD SONGBIRD

ABE JENKINS M.A.C.H. IV

P. NORBERT EBERSOL FIXER

DR. CHEN LU THE RADIOACTIVE MAN

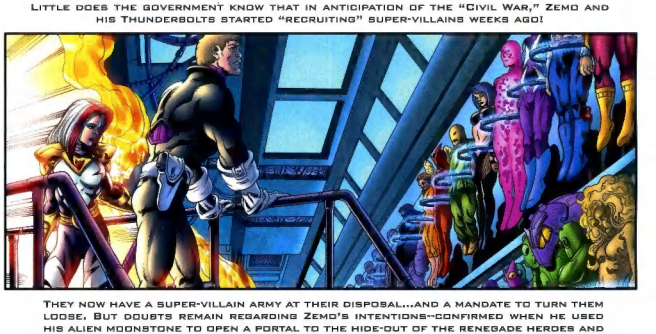
JANICE OLIVIA YANIZESKI JOYSTICK

AFTER SUPERHUMAN IRRESPONSIBILITY CAUSED AN EXPLOSION AT A CROWDED SCHOOLYARD IN STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT AND KILLED HUNDREDS OF CIVILIANS, LEGISLATORS PASSED THE SUPERHUMAN REGISTRATION ACT. BY LAW, ANYONE WITH PARANORMAL ABILITIES MUST NOW REGISTER THEIR IDENTITIES WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

MANY HAVE REFUSED TO SIGN THE ACT, AND, LED BY CAPTAIN AMERICA, HAVE FORMED A GROUP OF RENEGADE HEROES AGAINST THE STATUS QUO. THOSE IN FAVOR OF USING REGISTRATION TO CREATE A NATION-WIDE "SUPERHUMAN POLICE FORCE," LED BY IRON MAN, HAVE BEEN SCRAMBLING TO KEEP UP WITH SUPERVILLAIN ACTIVITY.

TO THAT EXTENT, THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT HAS ENTERED INTO AN UNPRECEDENTED AGREEMENT WITH BARON HELMUT ZEMO AND THE FORMER-VILLAINS-TURNED-HEROES, THE THUNDERBOLTS.

THEY ARE SANCTIONED TO APPREHEND ALL FREE OR ESCAPED SUPER-VILLAINS WITH A SIMPLE MANDATE: JOIN THE THUNDERBOLTS OR GO TO A JAIL FROM WHICH THEY WILL NEVER ESCAPE. LITTLE DOES THE GOVERNMENT KNOW THAT IN ANTICIPATION OF THE "CIVIL WAR," ZEMO AND HIS THUNDERBOLTS STARTED "RECRUITING" SUPER-VILLAINS WEEKS AGO!



THEY NOW HAVE A SUPER-VILLAIN ARMY AT THEIR DISPOSAL...AND A MANDATE TO TURN THEM LOOSE. BUT DOUBTS REMAIN REGARDING ZEMO'S INTENTIONS--CONFIRMED WHEN HE USED HIS ALIEN MOONSTONE TO OPEN A PORTAL TO THE HIDE-OUT OF THE RENEGADE HEROES AND OFFERED THEM HIS HELP!

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THEIR FIRST INSTINCT IS TO ATTACK. UNDERSTANDABLE, ZEMO THINKS, CONSIDERING THEIR HISTORY.
IN TIMES PAST, HE'S LEFT THE OLYMPIAN GOD, HERCULES, IN A COMA, AND BEDEVILED THE FALCON.
HE DOESN'T KNOW DAREDEVIL. HIS INCLINATION IS TO DESPISE HIM ON PRINCIPLE ALONE.
BUT THE REAL HISTORY-- A BLOOD HISTORY-- REMAINS BETWEEN ZEMO AND CAPTAIN AMERICA.
HIS FATHER, HEINRICH, FOUGHT THE SUPER-SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II, KILLING HIS PUPPY MASCOT, BUCKY.
THAT ACT PLUMMETED THE AMERICAN INTO A DECADES-LONG STATE OF SUSPENDED ANIMATION. UPON HIS RETURN, THE CAPTAIN CONFRONTED THE AGED FATHER, WHO DIED DURING THAT BATTLE.
THE SON ASSUMED THE MANTLE, AND FOR MANY YEARS, THE HATRED.
BUT FOR HEINRICH ZEMO, THAT HAS PASSED. OF COURSE, CONVINCING THE CAPTAIN OF THAT HAS PROVEN DIFFICULT TO THE POINT OF SUICIDE.
NOW, HIS GREATEST BATTLE AGAINST CAPTAIN AMERICA WILL NOT COME IN DEFEATING HIM, CRUSHING...HUMILIATING HIM...
...BUT RATHER, IN PROVING HE CAN BE TRUSTED... RELIED ON...AS AN ALLY... AND A FRIEND.
I ASSURE YOU ALL, THIS IS NOT NECESSARY...
YOU ARE BUT VERMIN TO BE CRUSHED!
THIS WON'T BE EASY AT ALL, HE THINKS...

PIG'S SCION!
CASTING STONES IN GLASS HOUSES, DEMIGOD...
WAIT--- HIS GEMS ARE GLOWING--
JUST ENOUGH SO THAT I COULD NEGATE ALL GRAVITY AROUND YOU...
...NOW YOU MAY FLOAT USELESSLY FOR THE DURATION...
CAPTAIN--I HAVE NOT COME TO FIGHT!
HAD I WANTED TO, YOUR ALLIES COULD HAVE BEEN BISECTED AND DISPERSED THROUGHOUT TIME, AND YET--
--SUCH SLAUGHTER IS A TASTE I HAVE NO APPETITE FOR.
BUT YOU WANTED TO MENTION IT, JUST SO WE'D KNOW?
FALCON--?
REDWING!
SKRAWK
AH, THE BIRD... I'D ALMOST FORGOTTEN ABOUT HIM...

TEAMWORK, ZEMO--SOMETHING THAT, AFTER ALL YOUR TIME WITH THE THUNDERBOLTS, YOU STILL SEEM TO HAVE VERY LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF...
MMNNF!
NOT SO TOUGH WITHOUT THOSE STOLEN MOONSTONES OF YOURS!
ACTUALLY... I'M RATHER PROUD TO ADMIT THAT I AM...
OH, SO THE GLASS JAW IS A THING OF THE PAST, THEN--?
YES, THAT, TOO, BUT I WAS REFERRING TO THE FACT THAT I NO LONGER NEED TO BE PHYSICALLY LINKED TO THE MOONSTONES...
"...TO CONTROL THEM."

WHAT DID YOU DO TO REDWING?!
HE IS EXACTLY WHERE HE SHOULD BE, FALCON...
SINCE I KNOW YOU SHARE A PRETERNATURAL ASSOCIATION WITH YOUR BIRD--
--PERHAPS YOU CAN BOTH DISCUSS WHAT IT IS LIKE...
...TO TRAVEL THROUGH ONE OF MY GRAVIMETRIC PHASE SHIFTS!
TELL ME YOU DIDN'T JUST KILL THEM!
A WORSE FATE EVEN THAN THAT.
I SENT THEM TO BAYONNE, NEW JERSEY.
NOW THEN...

NNGHH
YOUR SHIELD'S MASS IS LIKE THE WEIGHT OF THE WORLD, NO?
NOW YOU KNOW HOW IT FEELS TO BE ME.
AS IF YOU—
?
I AM QUITE DONE BEING HIT, THANK YOU.
I COME HERE WITH OPEN ARMS. I TELL YOU NOT ONCE, BUT THREE TIMES THAT I WISH ONLY TO TALK.
FINE. IF YOUR HATRED OF ME IS SO INGRAINED THAT YOU CANNOT CHANGE AS I HAVE—
—YOU LEAVE ME LITTLE CHOICE BUT TO TREAT YOU LIKE A SPOILED CHILD!
NOW THEN, I WILL HAVE MY SAY.
TIMES CERTAINLY HAVE CHANGED, WHEN I AM THE RATIONAL ONE AND YOU THE BESIEGED RADICAL...
YOUR GOVERNMENT HUNTS YOU DOWN AND ENLISTS ME FOR ASSISTANCE.
WHAT DOES THAT TELL YOU ABOUT YOUR POSITION, CAPTAIN?
THAT THERE ARE FORCES WITHIN MY GOVERNMENT WHO HAVE LOST THEIR WAY.

AND THE FACT THAT I HAVE COME TO OFFER YOU HELP, WHAT DOES THAT TELL YOU, CAPTAIN?
THAT YOU'RE PLAYING A GAME I HAVEN'T THE INTEREST OR THE TIME TO FIGURE OUT.
A GAME...? WHAT GAME WAS I PLAYING--
--WHEN I RISKED MY OWN LIFE TO SAVE YOURS?
I--I DON'T KNOW...
OF COURSE YOU DON'T. TO CONTEMPLATE THAT WOULD REQUIRE YOU TO CONSIDER THAT I HAVE INDEED CHANGED.
YOU HAVE WISHED-- EVERY DAY FOR THE LAST SIXTY YEARS, I WOULD IMAGINE--
--THAT THE ZEMO LINEAGE EITHER DID NOT EXIST OR COULD CHANGE ITS WAYS.
IN ONE MADDENING, GLORIOUS INSTANT, I VIRTUALLY HANDED YOU BOTH OPTIONS!
THERE IS ONLY ONE REASON THAT SOMEONE WOULD WILLINGLY SUBJECT THEMSELVES--AGAIN--
--TO THIS!!

ELSEWHERE IN MANHATTAN...
MELISSA GOLD HAS SEEN THE INSIDE OF TOO MANY BARS JUST LIKE THIS ONE.
STRANGE BEDFELLOWS
SHE HOPED THAT AS SONGBIRD, LEADER OF THE T-BOLTS, SHE'D GROWN BEYOND SUCH SEEDY DIVES.
SHOTS SPECIALS
2 for $5
ROCK AND A SHOT.
BUT THIS IS WHERE HER CONTACT WANTED TO MEET.
MAYBE SHE'S MEETING A WOMAN WHO KNOWS HER BETTER THAN SHE KNOWS HERSELF?
THESE ARE THE CURRENT CANDIDATES. YOU'LL PROBABLY BE BASED OUT OF DENVER.
TO CREATE A...COMFORT LEVEL...YOU'LL BE ABLE TO TAKE A FEW TEAM MEMBERS YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH...
...WELL, IF ANY OF YOU SURVIVE WHAT ZEMO SAYS IS COMING.
AND WHAT IF ZEMO SURVIVES?
THEN THAT PROBABLY MEANS YOU DIDN'T, WHICH MEANS...
...TONY STARK'S FIFTY STATES INITIATIVE PLAN FOR COLORADO WILL HAVE TO CHANGE.
DALLAS RIORDAN. FORMER THUNDERBOLT. CURRENT CO-CHAIR OF THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMISSION ON SUPERHUMAN ACTIVITIES.
A WOMAN WHO KNOWS SONGBIRD VERY WELL INDEED...

BELLINGTON, WASHINGTON.
FIVE BUCKS SHE COMES THROUGH THE FRONT WINDOW.
DOES EVERYTHING HAVE TO BE A BET WITH YOU, FIXER?
JUST MAKES IT MORE INTERESTING.
FIVE BUCKS, I'LL TAKE THE ROOF.
ROGUE'S GALLERY OF COSTUM
DAMN. HOW'D YOU FIGURE, ABE?
JOYSTICK LIKES TO COME IN HIGH, AND ACCORDING TO THE FILES I'VE READ, IRON MAIDEN ALWAYS GOES FOR THE UPPERCUT.
YOU REALLY ARE A SUPER HERO GEEK.
YOU EVER THINK THAT, A FEW YEARS AGO, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FIXER OR M.A.C.H. IV COMING HERE FOR A NEW LOOK--A FAKE I.D.--TO SNEAK OVER INTO CANADA?
WIMPS, BOTH OF YOU--JUST TOSS ME BACK AT THE METAL $%@!~!
HAVE A PARTY.
ANOTHER SUPER-VILLAIN TAKEN DOWN. YOU GOT A PROBLEM BEING A NARC, ABE?
NO, 'BERT... YES...I DON'T KNOW. WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I LOVE A GOOD PROBLEM, RIGHT? WHAT'S BETTER THAN TRYING TO FIX A WORLD THAT'S TURNED ITSELF UPSIDE DOWN...?

...THE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT OF ALICE NUGENT. MANHATTAN.
KYLE RICHMOND--THE FORMER DEFENDER NAMED NIGHTHAWK--HAS GOTTEN HIMSELF IN TOO DEEP.
IN [illegible] HELP THE THUNDERBOLTS, HE WAS HUMILIATED. IN HIS MISTRUST OF ZEMO, HE [illegible] TO [illegible] THOSE WHO OPPOSE HIM--
--THE SQUADRON SINISTER!
I'M BACK.
HOW GOES OUR [illegible] WITH THE HEROES?--?
I'M NOT A MOLE--OR A RAT--DOCTOR SPECTRUM.
I'M ONLY DOING THIS BECAUSE THIS CURRENT "CIVIL WAR" BETWEEN THE HEROES COULD HELP ZEMO.
SCREW ALL THAT--I JUST WANT REVENGE!
WE KNOW WHAT JOYSTICK DID TO YOU, JIM, BUT THIS HAS GOTTEN BIGGER THAN A RACE FOR POWER BETWEEN US AND THE THUNDERBOLTS.
INDEED, KYLE RICHMOND UNDERSTANDS...
WE WILL RESTORE YOUR SPEED DEMON ABILITIES IF WE ARE ABLE TO ACCESS THE WELLSPRING OF POWER AGAIN, JIM SANDERS.
I AM THE GRANDMASTER. I AM AN ELDER OF THE UNIVERSE. I NEVER PLAY A COSMIC [illegible] WITH THE INTENTION OF LOSING, BUT IN THIS CASE...
...IF ZEMO WINS--THEN THIS UNIVERSE DIES!
TO PLAY EVERY ANGLE, NIGHTHAWK HAS GOTTEN HIMSELF TRAPPED IN A [illegible] R.
AND GETTING HIMSELF OUT MEANS DECIDING WHICH OF TWO MADMEN WILL WIN OMNIPOTENT [illegible] R...

THE BAXTER BUILDING, HEADQUARTERS OF THE FANTASTIC FOUR.
THE SEEPAGE OF AMBIENT ENERGY CONTINUES TO ZEITGEISTER
RADIOACTIVE MAN IS RIGHT. WE STILL HAVEN'T FOUND THE WAY TO COMPLETELY SEAL THE PORTAL.
WE ARE PHASING THE FACILITY BETWEEN DISTINCT SPATIAL PLANES, HANK. CAN [redacted] EXPECT TO SCREEN OUT ALL AMBIENT ENERGIES?
DR. CHEN LU, THE RADIOACTIVE MAN, LISTENS TO HANK PYM AND REED RICHARDS, THE HEROES NAMED YELLOWJACKET AND MR. FANTASTIC.
LISTENS TO THEIR EUPHEMISMS, THEIR CLINICAL DETACHMENT TO THEIR SITUATION.
LISTENS...UNTIL HE'S HAD ENOUGH...
THE MAIN QUESTION, REED, IS, WOULD THAT ENDANGER ANY OF THE "GUESTS" WHO WILL BE IN "RESIDENCE"--?
AS A CHINESE NATIONAL WITH A [redacted] OF OPPRESSIVE [redacted]
FIND IT RATHER IF [redacted] THE BRIGHTEST OF THE UNITED STATES...THEIR ELECTED LEADERS
...ARE CREATING A SOCIAL CLIMATE SO SIMILAR TO THE ONES [redacted] HAVE SO LONG
THAT'S A BIT OF AN EXAGGERATION, DR. CHEN--
[redacted]
EXCUSE ME?
[redacted] AMERICA
[redacted]
[redacted] NO MORE!

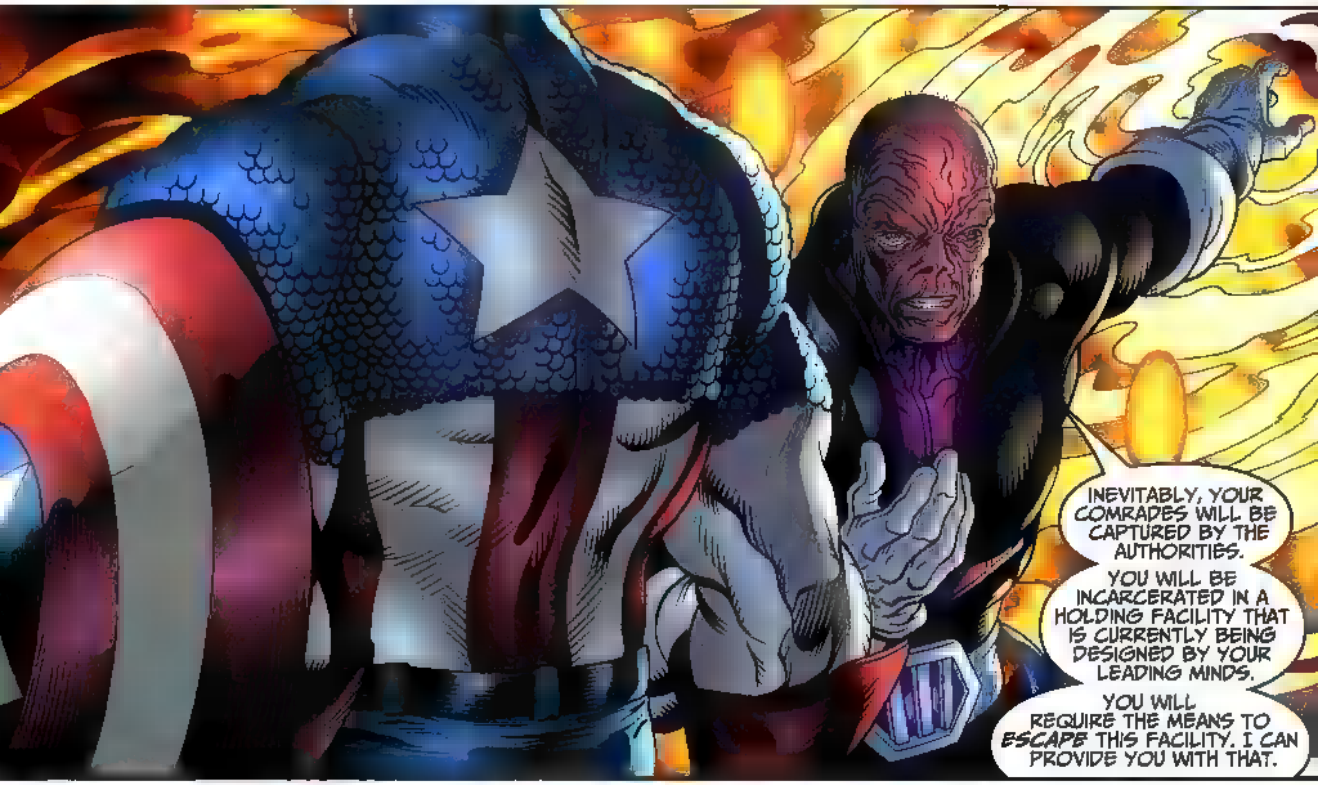
"IT WAS ONLY A FEW MONTHS AGO. YOU SHOULDN'T NEED A REMINDER, BUT PERHAPS YOU'VE BLOCKED IT OUT OF YOUR MEMORY.
"YOU INVADED THE THUNDERBOLTS' NORTH SEA FACILITY WHERE WE SOUGHT TO ACTIVATE THE LIBERATOR--
"--A DEVICE WHICH COULD HAVE RENDERED WAR OBSOLETE.
"THE ACTIONS OF THE AVENGERS RESULTED IN A PARANOID RETALIATORY BREAKDOWN BY MOONSTONE.
"SHE UNLEASHED A RATHER VICIOUS GRAVIMETRIC SURGE OF ENERGY..."
...WHICH I INTERCEPTED... WITH MY OWN BODY... WITHOUT THAT WONDERFUL SHIELD OF YOURS...
...AT GREAT... PERSONAL COST.
I DIDN'T NEED THE INSTANT REPLAY.
AND YET, TO SEE IT THROUGH A HOLE IN TIME...AS IT HAPPENED... BRINGS A...RENEWED PERSPECTIVE, DOESN'T IT--?
WHY DID I DO IT? WHAT WAS MY ULTERIOR MOTIVE? WHAT COMPLEX PLAN DID I SET IN MOTION?
AND THE ONE ASPECT I KNOW YOU HAVE CONSIDERED THE MOST DIFFICULT ONE...
...WHAT IF I HAD NO ULTERIOR MOTIVE? WHAT IF I DID WHAT I DID... WHAT IF I SAVED YOUR LIFE SIMPLY BECAUSE...
...IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

BUT CERTAINLY, YOU DISMISSED THAT. YOU'RE THINKING I RISKED MY LIFE--
--SACRIFICED MY FACE--ONCE AGAIN AND FOREVER--JUST TO MAINTAIN THIS "CHARADE" OF MINE...
...CONTINUE THIS "ILLUSION" THAT I HAVE CHANGED...
YES, YOU DECIDED, THAT IS CERTAINLY THE KIND OF INSANE, EXTREME, RIDICULOUS ACTION I WOULD TAKE... ISN'T IT?
UNLESS, OF COURSE... I REALIZED...
THAT THE ONLY WAY TO EVER BECOME A BETTER MAN...
...WAS TO ACCEPT AND UNDERSTAND THE THINGS MY FAMILY HAD DONE WRONG... THE THINGS WE WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR...
...SUCH AS THE DEATH OF YOUR PARTNER.
THEN TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I HAD DONE WRONG...
...SO MANY THINGS... SUCH AS THE ATTACK ON YOUR MANSION WITH THE MASTERS OF EVIL...
...SAVAGING YOUR BUTLER... DESTROYING YOUR KEEPSAKES BEFORE YOUR EYES...
A CHURLISH, CHILDISH ACT... WHICH BECAME WOEFULLY CLEAR--
--AT THE COST OF HAVING MY WORLD, MY ILLUSIONS--AND ULTIMATELY, MY LIFE--TAKEN FROM ME BY THE HUNTER, SCOURGE.
AND THEN, UNTIL MY ABSURDLY COMPLEX RESURRECTION, I ENDURED MY OWN "FROZEN" TIME, AS DID YOU...
I HAD SPENT A LIFETIME HATING YOU ONLY BECAUSE I WAS RAISED TO THINK MYSELF SUPERIOR TO ALL MANKIND.
YET--CLEARLY--TIME AND TIME... AND TIME AGAIN...

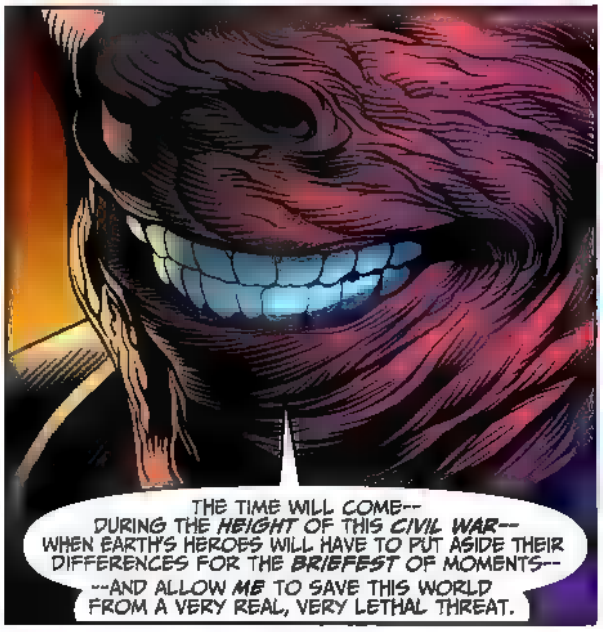
...I WAS NOT.

AND THAT'S WHY YOU SAVED MY LIFE? TO SHOW YOU COULD BE BETTER THAN ME?

NO. TO SHOW THAT I COULD BE BETTER THAN MYSELF.


INEVITABLY, YOUR COMRADES WILL BE CAPTURED BY THE AUTHORITIES.
YOU WILL BE INCARCERATED IN A HOLDING FACILITY THAT IS CURRENTLY BEING DESIGNED BY YOUR LEADING MINDS.
YOU WILL REQUIRE THE MEANS TO ESCAPE THIS FACILITY. I CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH THAT.

AND THERE'S THE CATCH... OF COURSE...
...WHAT DO YOU EXPECT ■ RETURN, ZEMO?


THE TIME WILL COME-- DURING THE HEIGHT OF THIS CIVIL WAR-- WHEN EARTH'S HEROES WILL HAVE TO PUT ASIDE THEIR DIFFERENCES FOR THE BRIEFEST OF MOMENTS-- --AND ALLOW ME TO SAVE THIS WORLD FROM A VERY REAL, VERY LETHAL THREAT.

IN ORDER TO STOP THE GRANDMASTER'S GRAND DESIGN FOR EARTH, YOU WILL HAVE TO TRUST [redacted] WITH THE LIVES OF EVERYONE ON IT.
YOU [redacted] CRAZY ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE THAT COSMIC MANIPULATOR [redacted] A SUPERHUMAN CONTEST?
NO, CAPTAIN...HE WAS CRAZY ENOUGH TO CHALLENGE ME.
IT'S ALWAYS SOME COMPLICATED SCHEME WITH YOU, ISN'T IT?
WHAT ARE YOU--
--DOING--? WHAT IS-- WAIT--
--THAT FOOTLOCKER-- IS THAT MY FOOT-LOCKER--?
MY FAMILY HERITAGE WAS TAKEN BY YOUR PROTÉGÉ, JACK MONROE, WHO WAS DUPED INTO ACTING AS SCOURGE.
I NEEDED TO LOSE MY PAST TO FIND MY FUTURE-- DIE--BODY AND SPIRIT--TO BE REBORN.
YOU DIDN'T NEED THAT. DIDN'T DESERVE THAT.
ROGERS S.

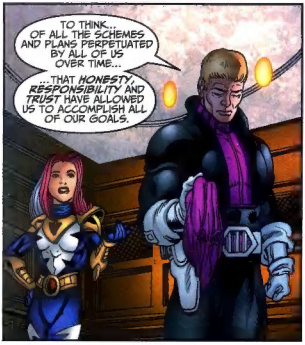
I RETURN THAT SMALL PIECE OF YOUR SOUL THAT I TOOK FROM YOU...
BUT--THIS WAS DESTROYED--YOU TOOK IT FROM MY QUARTERS AVENGERS MANSION--IN FRONT OF MY EYES YOU TOOK ITS CONTENTS--
ROGERS.S
--AND--
--RUINED... THEM...ALL...
MY ORIGINAL SHIELD--PHOTOS OF MY MOTHER--MY PEE WEE REESE AUTOGRAPHED BALL...
TIME IS A RIVER, CAPTAIN. IT CONTINUES TO FLOW FORWARD, INEXORABLY.
BUT THESE ALIEN GEMS, THEY ALLOW ME TO MANIPULATE TIME JUST ENOUGH--
--TO TOSS A STONE INTO THAT RIVER, AS IT WERE, IN THE FORM OF A GRAVIMETRIC BUBBLE.. FOR JUST A NANOSECOND--
--TO PROTECT SOMETHING IN TIME, PLUCK IT OUT WITHOUT OFFENDING...SO THAT THE RIVER KEEPS MOVING AROUND THE STONE...
...AND SUCH TREASURED MEMORIES CAN BE RESTORED.
BUGLE
DISASTER
MY ORIGINAL 4-F NOTICE... HMPH...

IT IS AN ELECTRONIC SPATIAL INTERFACE THAT WILL ENABLE YOU TO ESCAPE THE CAGE THAT AWAITS YOU.
HOW CAN YOU BE SO CERTAIN I'LL BE CAUGHT?
TO PROVE YOUR CAUSE JUST, YOU WOULD WANT TO BE CAUGHT ANYWAY, RIGHT...?
WITH THESE GEMSTONES, CAPTAIN, I COULD RULE THE WORLD.
I CHOOSE NOT TO.
I AM NOT YOUR ENEMY ANYMORE.
THIS KEY-- FIGURATIVELY AND LITERALLY-- PROVES THAT.
THANK YOU.
WHATEVER FOR? SAVING YOUR LIFE? GIVING YOU THIS KEY? SO MUCH TO CHOOSE FROM...
THANK YOU FOR GIVING ME HOPE...
...THAT THE STRUGGLE IS WORTH THE COST...

YOU MADE THE RIGHT DECISION THIS DAY.
AND IF I DIDN'T... I'LL BE THERE TO STOP YOU... TIME AND TIME AND TIME AGAIN...
THE FOLDING CASTLE.
THE INTERSPATIAL HEADQUARTERS OF THE THUNDERBOLTS IS COMPOSED OF REAL WORLD LOCATIONS LINKED TOGETHER BY SPATIAL PORTALS.
AND IN ONE PARTICULAR QUADRANT... ZEMO'S PERSONAL QUARTERS... BY A TEMPORAL PORTAL AS WELL.
AT AN EXPENSE OF GREAT POWER, ZEMO HAS CREATED A LINK TO HIS RAVAGED SOUTH AMERICAN CASTLE.
AND A TROPHY ROOM THAT HAD BEEN MAINTAINED BY HIS FATHER.
AT THE EXPENSE OF GREAT POWER...IS THIS REMINDER OF GREATER RESPONSIBILITY...
YOU WOULD DISAPPROVE OF THIS DAY'S DEEDS, WOULDN'T YOU?

AND YET, YOU TAUGHT ME TO BE SUPERIOR...
...AND SO... NOW... FINALLY... IN THOUGHT AND DEED... I AM...
TUMM TUMM
HELMUT? IT'S MELISSA. THE DOOR IS LOCKED.
ONE MOMENT, MELISSA. I AM NOT DECENT.
THERE.
HOW'D IT GO WITH CAPTAIN AMERICA?
BETTER THAN I COULD HAVE HOPED. I WAS ABLE TO CONVINCE HIM TO ASSIST OUR CAUSE AGAINST THE GRANDMASTER.
AND YOUR MEETING WITH DALLAS?

SAME. WHEN THE TIME COMES THEY'RE ON BOARD.
AND THE TIME COMES SOON.
EVERYTHING GOING TO HELL IN A HAND-BASKET WORKS OUT PERFECTLY FOR US.


TO THINK... OF ALL THE SCHEMES AND PLANS PERPETUATED BY ALL OF US OVER TIME...
...THAT *HONESTY*, *RESPONSIBILITY* AND *TRUST* HAVE ALLOWED US TO ACCOMPLISH ALL OF OUR GOALS.

WHAT ABOUT AFTERWARDS... WHEN ALL OF THIS IS DONE?
I THINK *YOU* WILL CONTINUE THE THUNDERBOLTS...
...AND I'M CONFIDENT, WITH THE PROPER PEOPLE IN PLACE, IT WILL BE A *FAR BETTER* ENDEAVOR THAN IT EVER WAS.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?
I WILL BE *DEAD*, MELISSA.
YOU WILL HAVE *BETRAYED* ME AND AS A RESULT, I WILL BE FORCED TO *SACRIFICE* MYSELF TO SAVE THIS WORLD.
SO...YOU KNOW...AND YOU STILL PLAN ON LETTING IT HAPPEN? WHY?

BECAUSE...MY WHOLE LIFE--MY ENTIRE HERITAGE--HAS BEEN BASED ON *SUPERIORITY*.
AND I WILL FINALLY BE ABLE TO PROVE THAT TRUE...
BY *DYING*?
NO, MELISSA... I AM A ZEMO... I WILL PROVE IT...

...BY *LIVING* FOREVER...
NEXT: LET THE GAMES BEGIN!

MARVEL HEROES HOTSPOT

Mark Gruenwald 1953-1996 -- Patron Saint of Marveldom

TOM SEZ

On August 12, 1996, ten years ago this month, Mark Gruenwald passed from this Earth. It was a shocking thing to hear for those of us who were around in the Marvel Bullpen at that point, in that Mark was a health nut and seemed in excellent physical condition. But an undiscovered congenital heart problem combined with extraordinary levels of stress wrote a premature end to his life and career.

Some reading this may remember Mark as a writer, the guy who wrote more issues of CAPTAIN AMERICA than anybody else, the guy who invented D.P.7 and guided the destiny of QUASAR, the guy who was the first to try to extrapolate the effects of super heroes on the real world in SQUADRON SUPREME. Others may recall Mark as a top-notch editor on such titles as AVENGERS, THOR and IRON MAN, one who ran a regular column in those books (and later MARVEL AGE) called "Mark's Remarks" which gave readers insight into the workings of the funny book business. And while this is all true, the Mark Gruenwald I want to talk about is the man behind the curtain.

If you were reading Marvel comics in the 60s and 70s, you were aware of the Marvel Bullpen that Stan Lee wrote about on the Bullpen Bulletins page and in the letters pages: a magical place where the best and the brightest within the four-color community toiled endlessly but contentedly, crafting the best comic books on Earth. But as time passed, and more and more behind-the-scenes information came out, it became apparent that this was a fantasy, a fictional construction. Things weren't quite so idyllic in the magical Bullpen, and the artists and writers had the same discontent as any other workers in any other job. It was all make-believe.

Except for Mark Gruenwald.

Mark was what you wanted Marvel to be like when you came to work there. Mark lived his life in the spirit of those ideals, because Mark loved comic books. Upon realizing at a young age that he'd never be able to become a super hero himself, he instead dedicated his life to telling stories of heroic fantasy. And he was the living embodiment of the Marvel Bullpen as Stan Lee envisioned it.

In trying to find a way to communicate Mark's spirit to the uninitiated, the closest analogous person I could come up with is Jim Henson. Like Henson, Mark lived life with a childlike gleam in his eyes, and with a philosophy that looked for the best in people, and delighted in making them laugh and feel good. He was a genuinely good person, one of the very few I've ever met. Even before he became Executive Editor, Mark was the de facto morale officer for Marvel, hosting insane, improbable parties in the Bullpen for every holiday, and masterminding stunts like M-day, in which practically the entire staff crowded into Mark's offices wearing Michelle Marsh masks, so Mark could film the event and send the footage to the local CBS affiliate where she worked. It was an act that Mark took on the road as the ringleader of several years of convention antics, where, rather than staid slideshows about what was coming up in next month's comics, Mark would create living board games and offbeat game shows, entertaining the crowd and making them all feel like they were a part of the Marvel lifestyle. As Mark's wife put it, Mark was silly about that which was serious, and serious about that which was silly.

His organized mind drove him to explore the structure of the fictional Marvel Universe in the form of such projects as the OFFICIAL HANDBOOK TO THE MARVEL UNIVERSE, in which he and a team of experts attempted to quantify and reference virtually every aspect of our fictional reality. This was an even more massive task in the days before computers, when every line of text had to be set by hand. Mark and his assistants such as Mike Carlin and Elliot Brown used to spend entire weekends locked away within the Marvel offices, pulling each issue together and pasting it up to be ready for print. The irony was that Mark was mainly a DC fan, having grown up on the early super hero efforts of editor Julie Schwartz. He had the chance, near the end, to work for DC, his former assistant Carlin having become their Executive Editor, but he turned the job down. Despite the dark times Marvel was going through, with massive layoffs due to "downsizing", he felt a responsibility to those around him and the work he had taken on. If he departed, there'd be no one left to look after the characters and the people who meant so much to him.

"Someday the universe will tire of me and will break me down into the components I came from. Right now I'd mind if that happened, but when the time comes I imagine I will welcome no longer being separate from the rest of reality."

--Mark Gruenwald

I was not especially close to Mark. Were you to have asked him to name his friends, I wouldn't have shown up in the top fifty. And I knew him for fewer years than he's now been gone. But he had a profound influence on my life and the way I conduct my career, just as he did for almost anyone whose path he crossed. And I'm very much aware every day that, in many ways, I'm sitting in his chair, as the caretaker of the mainstream Marvel Universe, the overseer of the Marvel Handbooks, and now the guy who writes columns for his own Bullpen page. It was a strange sort of milestone when I realized that I had now edited more issues of AVENGERS than he had.

Mark was not perfect. He was sometimes too analytical, and his sensitive nature made him perhaps the wrong person to be in a position of authority when it came time to let people go. I know he carried the weight of those firings all the rest of his days. He could waffle at times, not wanting to choose one person over another when conflicts cropped up between them. But he made his life what he wanted it to be, and seemingly enjoyed every moment of it. You'd be hard-pressed to find anybody with anything bad to say about Mark. His was a rare and singular vision. More than any other individual, Mark Gruenwald represented the fiction of Marvel, making it a reality even when the fact was a hard and cruel place.

Tom B

ON SALE AUGUST 2006

ANNIHILATION #1: Nova and crew make their final stand against Annihilus--and this is only the first issue!

BEYOND #2: With one of their number already dead, the heroes crash onto the Battleworld!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #21: Cap and the Winter Soldier side-by-side!

CIVIL WAR #4: A death! A betrayal! And a team reborn!

CIVIL WAR: FRONT LINE #5: Wonder Man is drafted!

CIVIL WAR: FRONT LINE #6: Speedball goes on trial!

CIVIL WAR: YOUNG AVENGERS & RUNAWAYS #2: What lurks within the Cube?

FANTASTIC FOUR #540: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Four no more!

FANTASTIC FOUR: FIRST FAMILY #6: The FF's final confrontation with their first archenemy!

IRON MAN #11: Under attack by his teammates, Iron Man must work to save himself!

JACK KIRBY'S GALACTIC BOUNTY HUNTERS #2: In order to save his son, Mainframe must reunite the Galactic Bounty Hunters!

MARVEL TEAM-UP #23: As Freedom Ring convalesces, the New Avengers fight the Iron Maniac!

MS. MARVEL #6: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Ms. Marvel, hero-hunter!

MYTHOS: HULK #1: Hulk's origin retold in all its gamma-irradiated, painted glory.

NEW AVENGERS #23: A CIVIL WAR tie-in. Things go south for double-agent Spider-Woman.

SHE-HULK #11: The honeymoon is over for She-Hulk!

THUNDERBOLTS #105: A CIVIL WAR tie-in: Zemo takes on Captain America!

X-FACTOR #10: What is Madrox's secret? Who betrays X-Factor?

FIVE FUN FACTOIDS FROM AUBREY SITTERSON

Editor of MARVEL TEAM-UP

1. I'm a Nintendo DS Fanatic--I take on all comers in Mario Kart, and my Animal Crossing town is like heaven.
2. My love for ECW wrestling is only a little ironic. Rob Van Dam will always be my champion.
3. I prefer Namor's green trunks over the black vest--it's like wearing a jean jacket in the pool.
4. Aubrey is NOT a girl's name.
5. There's a giant peacock tattoo on my back--don't ask...

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